DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 143 469 RC 010 031

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TITLE The Mexican American Woman and Mental Health.
PUB DATE 13 Jun 75
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Arizona Conference for Spanish-Speaking Women (1st, Arizona, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; Changing Attitudes; Characterization; Cultural Traits; Culture Conflict; Emotional Adjustment; *Females; Literature; *Mental Health; *Mexican Americans; Psychological Characteristics; Role Conflict; Role Perception; *Self Congruence; *Self Esteem; Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; Working Women
IDENTIFIERS *Chicanas

ABSTRACT

For a long time Chicanas have been self-denying, self sacrificing. Well, it is time that Mexican American women began thinking of themselves. It follows that if women love and cherish others, they must begin by loving and cherishing themselves. From the mental health perspective it is essential that they do so, not only for their sake, but for that of those around them; for how can they truly value others if they do not value themselves. Since the Chicana has always been the mainstay of the family, the mental health of her family is dependent on her positive self-image and self-identity. In freeing herself to be herself, she is freeing others to be themselves too. This paper discusses the indicators of the Chicana's mental health--self-identity, self-image, understanding and acceptance of herself, her perceptions of the world around her and her relationships with others, her ability to handle crises and cope with stress, and her flexibility to shift roles without discomfort; the Mexican American woman within the bicultural mileau; attitudes held by mental health professionals; the concept of women from the Mexicano point of view; sexism in the language and literature; the Chicana's attitudes toward and role in the women's movement; the stereotypic views of the Mexican American woman; and the importance of the Chicana having a positive self-image and self-identity of herself. (NQ)

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THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMAN* AND MENTAL HEALTH*

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Presented at the
"FIRST ARIZONA CONFERENCE FOR
SPANISH-SPEAKING WOMEN"

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THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMAN*
AND
MENTAL HEALTH*

I consider it a distinct honor to be able to address you today. I want to congratulate the League for being concerned with such timely issues and for providing leadership.

I am particularly impressed with the theme of the mental health workshop: Think of yourself--piensa en ti. For so very long the Mexican American woman, perhaps more than any other in our society, has been abnegada, self-denying, self sacrificing. Y ya basta! Mexican American women must think of themselves. No matter from what perspective one views this idea, it is a positive one. From the Christian stand point, for instance, the Lord said, "Ama a tu prógimo como a ti misma," Love your neighbor as yourself," not more than yourself. Thus it follows that if women love and cherish others, their children, their spouses, their parents, they must begin by loving and cherishing themselves. From the mental health perspective it is also essential that they do so, not only for their sake, but for that of those around them; for how can they truly value others if they do not value themselves?

Mental health has actually become a household word. The concept is no longer viewed with awe and as the mere absence of mental illness. It is seen as positive force having to do more with attitudes and feelings toward one's self and the world around.

To my knowledge, there is no universally accepted scientific definition of mental health. Almost twenty years ago Karl Meninger, an outstanding mental health figure defined it as:

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* In this paper the terms "Mexican American" and "Chicano" are used interchangeably. The term "Anglo" refers to white non-Chicanos.

** Some of the materials used in this paper had been presented by the author at the "Lenten Luncheons" at Our Lady of the Lake College on March 12, 1975.

> ...the adjustment of human beings to the world and to each other with a maximum of effectiveness and happiness. NOt just efficiency or just contentment--or the grace of obeying the rules of the game cheerfully. /emphasis added/ It is all of these together.[1]

Obeying the rules cheerfully! Perhaps that is what women have been doing for too long--

In the years since Meninger defined it, a number of mental health professionals have attempted to define mental health, but most of the definitions continued to treat it as the relative absence of mental illness. Undoubtedly mental health is more subject to description than precise definition. Knee and Lawson say it is a value, and as other values, it is prone to different interpretations and standards which vary with time, place, culture and expectations of a social group.[2] Mental health, indeed, means different things to different people, at different times. It has to do with how a group defines normal behaviors and individual roles. Acceptance of the norm, conformity, obeying the rules, as Meninger said, is usually considered as mentally healthy. The evaluation of actions as sick or normal or extraordinary in a positive sense, largely depends on accepted social convention.[3]

Commonly accepted indicators of mental health are the person's self-image, her understanding and acceptance of herself, her perceptions of the world around her and her relationships with other people, and her ability to handle crises and cope with stress;[4] also the flexibility in shifting roles without discomfort. Women, perhaps more than men, shift roles constantly throughout the day: from the housewife and mother to employee, student, consumer, daughter, sister, friend, nurse, hostess, lover, and perhaps to a few other more exotic roles. Mental health is also the ability and the freedom to live up to ones fullest potential as a creative human being and to have the social skills to love and to be loved, to work and to play. It is essential that Mexican-American women learn how to receive love. Whereas they give love abundantly, they do not always receive it graciously. They do not always take time to receive love even when others are ready to give it.

It is through the development of these skills to love and be loved, to work and play, that one is able to achieve a measure of satisfaction from life that not only adds to one's own fulfillment, but also contributes to the lives of others.[5] In a global sense people are happy if what they want from life is in harmony with what life has to offer them.[6]

Paramount among the indicators are self-identity and self image, two sides of the same coin. So what kind of an identity does the Mexican American woman have? La mujer Chicana quien es? Navar says that to speak of Chicanas is to speak of a multitude of experiences, of histories, and of realities.[7] As a people the Mexican Americans are a heteragenous group, a bilingual-bicultural group, who are the creation of the imperial conquest of one nation by another through military force.[8] "Their roots were planted in this land before the Pilgrims boarded the Mayflower."[9] They are the embadiment of biological, cultural, and social heterogencity. Their deversity springs from the heritage of the Indio, the Español, the Mestizo and the synthesis, or in some instances, syncretism, of this heritage with the Anglo culture. Chicanos have developed new modes of thought and action which are neither identical to those of the Mexicanos nor to those of the Anglos. However, they do incorporate into their own ethos much of both societies.[10] If the Mexican Americans are placed on a continium,some are at one end, more Mexicanized, others at the other extreme, more Anglosized, but most fall somewhere in between. On the "Mexicanized" side are those who are recent immigrants or older people who have remained isolated or those who have chosen to retain their culture intact. But they, too, live in a bicultural world for in many ways the Anglo culture affects them and almost daily they have to make accomodations to it. The Anglosized group, by the same token, remain influenced by their background. Their philosophy of life, their style of thinking, their view of the world about them, continue to be affected by it, even if so imperceptably. To paraphrase a saying in English, "You can take a Chicano out of the culture, but you can not take the culture of the Chicano."

Linguistally, Mexican Americans are bilingual. At the heart of the Chicano experience is his language which is a synthesis of American English and Mexican Spanish.[11] Looking at the group on a continium again, there are those at one end who do not speak English but who will sprinkle their speech with English words, for how do you translate "coffee break," "baby sitter," or "henpecked."[12] Conversely even those who do not speak Spanish will use Spanish words and phrases which are non-translatable.[13]

As a group, too, they have not agreed on nomenclature. Some choose to be called Chicanos, other prefer to be called Mexican Americans, Hispanic, Spanish Americans, Spanish Speaking, Latinos, and so on. But all of them share, to a lesser or greater degree, oppression, descrimination, and the effects of racism.

What about the Mexican American woman within the bicultural mileau; what kind of an image, what kind of identity does she have? From the Anglo side, the most recent influence, the top cultural layer as it were, there is the issue of women being considered chattel, the property of men along with real estate, children and slaves.[14] The American ideology of equal opportunity for every one has generally applied to men, white men, not so universally to women, even white women. American women, including the Chicanas, have been viewed by outsiders, especially Latinos, as spoiled and pampered and men-controlling, which to a certain extent is true, but which is a symptom, a reflection of their discontent. If they cannot attain what they want as equals, they will get all they can in the guise of spoiled children. In spite of the fact that there have been feminist movements since the mid-eighteen hundreds, it has not been until recently as the accumulating reservoir of feminist consciousness has been building up rapidly over the past few years, that a reexamination of all the social institutions have been taking place. One of the last to come into sharp scrutiny is the economic role of women, especifically as it relates to the labor force. This has special significance to minority women, particularly Chicanas.

> The total absorption of women into the maternal role as a physiological and psychological destiny is one of the preferred mythologies of our time.[15]

Just as racism, the oppression of women is rooted in the need for economic exploitation.

> John Kenneth Galbraith, among others, has revealed how a culture creates this cherished myth and maintains it for economic reasons. He uncovers the interesting ways in which a culture, through shaping attitudes, creates the virtuous woman /emphasis added/ as the good housekeeper, the good homemaker, a good mother, a good helpmate, giving value only to her home and family as a basis of her real work. Galbraith refers to this as the conversion of women into a crypto-servant class, serving an economic accomplishment "of the first importance." Galbraith invents the phrase for this cultural imperative: "the convenient social virtue." This phrase captures his meaning that we ascribe merit to any pattern of behavior, however uncomfortable or unnatural for the individual involved, which serves the comfort or well-being of the more powerful members of our community.[16]

That behavior, than, which inconveniences this group is labeled deviant behavior and becomes subject to the righteous disapproval of the community. Galbraith adds that this convenient social virtue is most important for inducing people to perform unpleasant services. Virtuous behavior, then, serves as a substitute for monetary compensation. Down through the centuries, this convenient social virtue has helped to obtain the compassionate, but poorly paid, services of nurses, teachers, and I might add, social workers.[17] This is how a whole class of unpaid workers have been produced to manage the various tasks of consumption of the primary consumer unit, the family. This has contributed to the economy and explain the anomaly that half of all American women have been expected to work at home, regardless of talent and training, for nothing but love.[18]

Of course women have always worked doing other than domestic chores: when the pioneers were forging their way West, during World War I and during World War II; some of us are old enough to remember Rosie the Riveter, but this has always been in response to the needs of the economic system. When the need is over, back to the home they go to resume the "mother's mission," the mythical ideal of the 1950's,

for instance.[19] It was assumed that after the war was over, women would be content to return home dutifully, to resume their household chores, and the returning veterans would again occupy their positions within the labor force.

The myth that those women who work are the single ones, unmarried, divorced, widowed; or that they work to earn pin money or to provide small luxuries for the family has finally eroded. So has the myth that if women marry <u>they will be taken care of for the rest of their lives</u>! The number of households dependent on women has increased by 56 percent. In this area minority women are over-represented; three times as many minority women as white women support themselves and their families without a husband present. The economic vulverability of this group is obvious. A substantial number of women who work, do so to improve life for their families, to help them move up from poverty level. This applies primarily, though not exclusively, to minority women.[20]

But in spite of the increasing dependence of the economy on the work of women, not all jobs are available to them. There is a long way to go before women, particularly minority women, are represented in all job categories. It appears as if women seem content, or perhaps reconciled, to do the kind of work that women have always done: teaching, nursing, social work, clerical work and, of course, domestic work; for women <u>are</u> taught almost from birth, that they have no capacity for, or interest in scientific, mathematical, managerial or mechanical pursuits. If they do feel capable to do so, and are interested, they are considered neurotic and unfeminine, rejecting of their natural role,and therefore, maladjusted. Women are expected to depend on their affiliations with others, their spouses or the children for instance, for their self-image a situation that often produces very low self-esteem.[21]

Much to their detriment, this stereotypic view of women which labels them as inferior, inadequate in some roles, and often capricious promoting sexism and male supremacy ideology, is held by mental health professionals too. Freud is alleged to have said when confronted with women's discontent, "What in God's name do women want?"

The salient features of the classical psychoanalytic view of femininity have been:

1) Anatomy is woman's destiny: Her nature is determined by it. The psychologically normal woman is concerned chiefly with the roles of wife and mother,
2) Penis envy: The female child considers herself defective and incomplete and is, therefore, envious of the male. And, of course, she considers him superior. She is partially compensated by the fact that she is capable of giving birth to a child, possibly a male child,
3) Faulty development of superego: Because of her femaleness, her ambivalence about detaching from her mother is marked and she has more difficulty in resolving the Oedipal conflict and, therefore, has less capacity for sublimation.
4) Masochism and passivity: Because generally she feels inferior and inadequate, her aggression is focused inward. This results in a masochistic, a self-punishing, personality. In addition, because sexually her role is one of receptor, she naturally develops passive tendencies in all social roles.[22]

Obviously classical psychoanalytic theory is male-oriented and emphasizes the male as the model for normalcy. Rice and Rice point out:

> What is more significant, however, is how anatomical differences have been built by psychoanalytic theorists into a powerful system of psychological, moral, intellectual and societal values that transcend mere physiology.[23]

Neo-Freudians such as Lidz and Erikson, whose works are broadly read, reflect similar biases of feminine inferiority. They, too, correlate feminine identity with biological function.[24]

There is a tremendous need to re-evaluate the Freudian representation of woman's condition in a male-dominated society and of the Freudian stereotype that women are passive, submissive, dependent and non-assertive--characteristics which our society considers desirable and normal in women and, therefore, values.

Sexism is reflected through language also. There was a provocative article in an issue of Social Work not too long ago on frequently used terms and concepts in speech that have racist connotations. A more recent article in the same journal makes the point that "the invisible but influential hand of sexism is at work in

every day speech and professional jargon."[25] The author states:

> It is difficult to make claims about the relationship between sexist or racist terminology and discriminatory practices, but one cannot doubt that such a relationship exists. We are so surrounded by our native language that we fail to recognize "language not only expresses ideas and concepts but may actually shape them."[26]

One only has to consult the dictionary to see the differences as to how "mankind" and "womankind" are defined. One definition of man, for instance, explains that it is correlative to wife--not woman, what is woman after all, but wife? Woman on the other hand is simply defined as an "adult female person, an attendant, a mistress, or not male."[27] Correspondingly, the Spanish dictionary defines man extensively while mujer, woman, is defined narrowly as esposa, wife, etc. Interestingly, "Mujer de mal vivir, publica, prostituta," prostitute, is listed before "Mujer de su casa, la que tiene govierno y disposicion para mandar o ejicutar los quehaceres domesticos," housewife.[28]

Granted changes are being made in the English vocabualry. The Women's Bureau in the Labor Department has been instrumental in changing the names of a number of common occupations to neutral designations; for instance, "boatmen" are now "boat operators," "chambermaids" are now "lodging quarter cleaners," "policemen" are now "police officers" and "maids" are now "private household cleaners."[29] This represents a break-through, but as long as so many of the slang terms for females continue to connote her decorative and sexual appeal to males (tomatoe, broad, etc.), and the slang terms for male have connotations resting on his own characteristics (guy, bloke, etc.),[30] we have a long way to go.

But what about the concept of women from the Mexicano point of view? It has not been a positive image either. The Spaniards brought with them the Christian European influence which relegated women to an inferior position also. They valued virginity. They adhered to St. Paul's opposition to sex and to his anti-feminist doctrine.[31] They also reflected the Arab influence where the woman was seen as a

possession and a naturally evil creature,[32] a domesticated animal, lecherous and sinful from birth "who must be subdued with a stick and guided by the reins of religion."[33] There seemed to be for the Spaniards only two positions that women could hold: The position of prostitute, the carrier of original sin, who tempted men, who sold her body, who brazenly enjoyed sex; the sexually aggresive wife was placed in this position too; mentally she is considered a prostitute. The other position was that of the virgin, the pure woman, the untouched maiden, or in a sense, the "mental" virgin, the self-denying passive wife available only for purposes of procreation. They also considered them inferior "porque son delicadas," constitutionally fragile, and need protection.

The Spaniards killed the Indians or enslaved them, imposed their religion on them, and took over their political and economical power. They also <u>took</u> their women. They created La Malinche who is seen "como traidora de su gente, como prostituta, as a traitor to her people, as a prostitute, and not as a person who gave herself out of love and in an effort to <u>help</u> her people. The "powerful father" imposed his will, his culture, his concept of women on La Raza. But Amerinda was the mother and in the prehispanic Indian culture, women had a central place in society. It was a matrilinial society, not matriarchal, one which valued women.[34] And that value has persisted ever so subtlely; that influence is still with Chicanas. It has sustained them and helped them to survive.

Octavio Paz, a Mexican, poet and philosopher, brilliant in many ways, is perhaps the most quoted authority on Mexican women. He sees them as inferior and inadequate human beings. El dice:

> Las mujeres son seres inferiores porque, al entregarse se abren. Su inferioridad es constitucional y radica en su "rajada," herida que jamos cicatriza.[35]

He says:

> Women are inferior beings because, in submitting they open themselves up. Their inferiority is constitutional and resides in their sex, their submissiveness, which is a wound that never heals.

Paz further describes the Mexican woman as an instrument of either the masculine desires or some-

times, of the ends assigned her by morality, society and the law, as a repository of certain values, as only a reflection of masculine will and desire. He sees her as an "undifferentiated manifestation of life, a channel for the universal appetite" and, therefore, with no desires of her own.[37] She is a symbol of the stability and the continuity of the race, he continues, and as such is treated with respect, but admittedly, this is done hypocritically. According to him, Mexican women have not been asked for their opinion, but they would undoubtedly prefer less respect and more freedom to be themselves. He claims that when she is passive, she is adored by men as goddess, but when she is aggressive she becomes "la mala mujer," the bad woman, unlike "la madre abnegada," the self-denying mother, "la novia que espera," the waiting sweetheart, like the bad woman who comes and goes, looks for men, seduces them, and then abandons them.[38]

I find it impossible to accept Paz' concept of women. I refuse to accept his definition of their nature. The associations he makes represent an "egotestical" point of view as Castillo calls it.[39] Undoubtedly his philosophy is that of other Mexicans. And there are women who give authenticity to it. But Mexicanas como La Corregidora, las guerrilleras, las Adelitas, las campesinas, who for generations have fought the elements along side their men, las mujeres en sus hogares, those who have carried a consolidating function for their families, the new professionals, the new revolutionaries; all of these women belie it!

And the Mexican American woman, la Chicana, que envuelve todas estas herencias, that embodies all these heritages, how does she see herself? Unfortunately many Chicanas see themselves as inadequate, incapable, inarticulate, and helpless, and as having only the role of procreation. They accept the stereotype presented in the literature and through the media. They accept as fact the results of ethnocentric research which presents her as inferior and not only incompetent as a Mexican American, but as a woman as well. They are told consistently by the teachers of their children that they are not raising them right. They are not teaching them English, good English. They are told that they are alingual, that they do not speak good Spanish. The teachers who do speak Spanish learned it, more than likely through summer courses in Cuernavaca or perhaps in

Madrid. They are told at the employment office, or by potential employers that all they can do, even when otherwise prepared, is maids' work, or laundry work, or if considered for clerical work, they are told they can only be paid very low salaries because, in spite of their credentials. they are not well prepared and need long term in-service training. If they are aggressive enough to ask for their rights, excuses are given for not hiring them because they are labeled trouble-makers. But even for the urban, educated, middle class Chicana who usually has more alternatives, sophisticated skills and greater mobility than her sisters in the barrios and the fields,[40] there are further complications. In the persuit of affirmative action in employment and education Chicanas are faced with the fact that they become a threat to Chicanos. Chicanos have not shared equality socially and economically with men of the majority culture and having to compete with their women, too, for jobs and other opportunities, must seem as an unsurmountable obstacle. When a Chicana begins to compete for employment, more often than not she is pitted against a Chicano, not against an Anglo male or female. The employers for obvious reasons may prefer to hire a Chicana. In this way they cover two areas, minority and sex. So to cap it all, Mexican American women are sometimes told by their fathers, their brothers, their husbands, and at times even by their sons, to keep their place in the home.

Hence Mexcian American women continue to struggle with the double,but related issues, of racism and sexism.

As a group Chicanos have come a long way in working through some of the problems of racism, but there is still quite a distance to go for it persists, especially as it is institutionalized. The problems of sexism, though of long standing, as mentioned earlier, have only recently become an issue for Chicanas as the women's movement has gained momentum, not only nationally, but internationally and as they had to make a decision about the Equal Right Amendment. I am frequently asked, particularly by students, if I believe in "women's lib". Young women ask me seriously; young men often with a smirk. Eyebrows are usually raised when I answer in the affirmative as they usually do when an older woman particularly does so, for the image that comes to mind when talking about "womens lib" is that of a hostile, aggressive, man-hating, bra-discarding woman. And if

the woman happens to be Chicana, the conclusion is reached that she is also rejecting her culture. Many Chicanas have been afraid to become involved in any aspect of the "liberacion femenil". They are concerned about what appears to be moral issues, and they wonder how their participation will reflect on their ethnicity. Young women particularly are afraid that their interest in the movement will appear as if they not only want to be "liberadas" but "libertinas" as well, for in the minds of many Mexican American people the two terms are synonimous. Women need to educate themselves concerning the real issue involved and recognize the true distinction between the women's rights movement and the negative image of "womens lib" created by the media which is the status quo.[41]

Although they have been mistakenly led to believe that radical feminists advocate that they do so, Chicanas do not have to divorce themselves from their cultural heritage or to be alienated from their men. The Chicanas' view on the qualities of womanhood, their strong family ties and their respect for the family as an institution, can encompass and accept a movement which asserts, not one that divides.[42] If the movement appeals to the basic issue of human rights for both men and women and I believe that it does; if it frees them from sexism in their relationships for it is a fact that a woman with freedom of choice also frees her man to decide what he wants to do with his life - if it appeals to the real issues involved and not only to a misconceived illusion - the Chicanas will support this movement.

Lourdes Miranda King, a Puerto-Riqueña says, "It has been a basic misunderstanding of the movement as anti-male, anti-family; and somehow, sexually promiscuous which has made it difficult for more Puertorriqueñas . . . to embrace the cause of feminism".[43] I believe Mexican Americans have had similar misunderstandings. Mexican Americans have to recognize that "no one makes it," really, until the whole group makes it, both male and female. Pro-woman does not mean anti-men, just as pro-minority does not mean anti-majority. The "I-win-you-lose" meniality has no place in either the Chicano movement or the women's movement.

But as Consuelo Nieto says, "The task facing Chicanas is monumental. On the one hand

she struggles to maintain her identity as a Chicana. On the other hand her demands for equity as a woman involve fundamental cultural change." And this, precisely, is what puts Chicanas in a double bind. For some of them, particularly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to accept changes in culture. Mexican Americans have been fighting total assimilation; rejecting the myth of the melting pot. Some have been demanding that they be allowed to participate as full members in the larger society without being deculturalized. They have been asking that their differences be recognized, respected and valued. They were asking for a democratic society. So what now? Se venden? Se hacen agringadas? I do not believe this is necessary. The culture of dynamic group has to be dynamic. That is, it is in a constant state of flux. By culture it is meant that set of beliefs, customs, mores, values and language that have meaning for a group, that defines its identity. Within a culture there are endless variations and nuances as to how the values are interpreted through the living experiences. Al fin y al cabo, cada cabeza es un mundo. Each mind is a world unto itself. Internal changes within a group, environmental changes beyond control, even the process of maturation, groups and societies mature too, may call for modifications, not only superficially, but also fundamentally in the core values, and in the primary beliefs of an ethnic group. As seen through the sketchy review of the history, the process of modification of the culture has been ongoing for generations. As values became non-functional and life situations changed, new modes of living were adopted. However, Mexican Americans have succeeded in retaining, in spite of these changes, el corazón y el espiritu de su cultura; the heart and spirit of their culture.

Further evaluation is needed now, and appropriate modifications need to be made. For rigid adherence to non-functional values and outmoded beliefs can be detrimental to Chicanos. It is not sound in terms of mental health to do so.

One of the issues concerning the women's movement is that of role definition. This is often equated to task assignment. Women consistently carry out their domestic chores, offer support and provide leadership within the home. Men do not help at home, but this has been

most often because life for the poor, and the greater majority of Chicanos have been poor, has been a matter of survival. Traditionally, they provide material support for their families, a sun-up to sun-down endeavor. This "is in their heart and conscience."[44] Where could they find the time and energy for domestic tasks? Besides, Chicanos have suffered indignities through racism and discrimination, and their frustration has led them to assert their masculinity through the only way available to them, submission of their wives and children. But this is true of all suppressed men, not only the Chicanos.

No doubt hundreds of thousands of Mexican American women, as other Latinas, have been victims of the negative aspects of "machismo" and "hembrismo" and of course "marianismo. Reinforced by ethnocentric, superficial and inadequate research, the stereotypic view of "machismo" as exaggerated masculinity, and exaggerated femeninity, "hembrismo" as Bermudez calls it,[45] persist. Much to their detriment Chicanos have at times accepted the stereotypes. The negative components of machismo continue to exist at least by reputation. There are some changes, however. Recent research by Kinser, for instance, points out that not all researchers have myopic vision and cast doubts on the validity or even the existence of negative machismo and female passivity.[46]

From the Chicano point of view, machismo encompasses those behaviors displayed by a man in an effort to assert his masculinity. It is a positive concept; one which moves a man to be responsible, to act with dignity, to provide leadership for his family enabling him to carry on against all odds whether it be in the battlefield, in the employment lines or fighting for survival in the barrio. Anthony Quinn has described it as a sense of responsibility to one's country, to one's community and to one's family.[47] Every man, be he white, brown, black, or yellow, innately needs to assert his masculinity, to feel respected by his family and his peers, and most importantly, to have self-respect. Unfortunately in an oppressive and discriminatory society, not all men are given the opportunity to affirm themselves positively through their jobs and through their life styles. Many are constantly subjected to indignities, to insults and at times feel dehumanized. The only avenue open to them to be assertive as stated earlier, is through the control and subjugation of their wives and children. How else can they feel like me

in control of their destinies? At times they act violently and commit crimes because the least insinuation that they lack masculinity becomes intolerable. Their negative self-concepts becomes so internalized that at times even after the environmental situation changes, they do not know how to behave differently and continue to try to be super-machos. Hembrismo, the corollary of the concept of machismo also has positive and negative aspects. A wife often develops a self-concept that is diametrically opposed to that of her husbands'. If he asserts his machismo in a positive way, she, too, will assert her hembrismo positively; she will have a positive self-concept. By the same token the wife of the angry, self-doubting macho will be masochistic, passive and self-effacing. Exaggerated machismo produces exaggerated hembrismo.

Marianismo, the third concept, a term coined by Stevens,[48] is that which promotes the view of women as being saintly, long-suffering, pure and who reflect the image of la Virgen Maria, the Virgen Mary; el concepto de la virginidad hipócrita.[49] Some women accept this as their self-image and enjoy playing the role of martyrs. This concept, this view of women prompts some men to place their women on a pedestal and in this way isolate them and keep them from fully participating in life.

Mexican American men and women must abandon superficial roles and outmoded attitudes. Each must support the other in the struggle for identity and fulfillment. Their mental health requires it. Granted, this is not an easy task. The majority of Chicanos, though not with a negative macho view, continue to relate to women either as inferiors, las subajan, relegate them to a lower position, or as superior, at least spiritually, and venerate them on pedestal. Either way women are oppressed and excluded from full participation in decision-making within their families.

Chicanas must raise their level of awareness. Too many do not realize or acknowledge the extent of their oppression. Many accept it as the norm. Some explain it as "Ya me toco." They must move; tienen que quitarse del tocadero. Dios dice ayúdate que yo te ayudare! Some women are very threatened by change and prefer to main-

tain the status quo. In their view, "mas vale malo por conocido, que bueno por conocer." It is diffucult to give up what one has considered inevitable. They experience cultural pressures or are afraid of cultural dislocation and, therefore, they prefer to live according to old conventions and assumptions of their culture.

Chicanas must not doubt their fitness, either as Mexican Americans or as females. They need to debunk stereotypes. They need to deal with their men openly, assuring them that they do not want to replace them, but to stand side by side with them. Chicanos must not feel that they are going to be destroyed by women's liberation. They must recognize that to fight and provide for fulfillment while denying equality to women does not serve the true aim of la causa, and will not liberate Mexican Americans in a full sense. Only in the true spirit of carnalismo, of hermandad, brotherhood, with freedom for all, both men and women, can true liberation occur.[50]

Aside from ending legal and employment discrimination, another goal of the women's movement is to reshape the marital relationships on an equal and, hence, stronger basis. This will not be too difficult for many couples who, in effect, have this type of relationship already. Some, por el que diran, what will people say, assume, at least publicly, traditional roles. The Chicano family has been a mainstay and a source of energy for the survival of la raza in the United States. And it can continue to be, even when male-female relationships are realigned.[51] The balance created by exaggerated machismo with hembrismo emcompassing resignation, abnegation and passivity, is not a true balance. One based on equality is! Mexican American men and women can find joy and happiness within the institution of marriage, one which allows for both spouses to grow as individuals. A marriage which offers an honest and open relationship between two people based on equal freedom and opportunity for self-fulfillment for both partners, is possible for Chicanos. There is no real need for a dominant partner or a submissive one. Rather, a good marriage depends on the continued growth of the two individuals--making the whole greater than its parts.[52] This will help the children too. It is easier for them to respect parents who obviously respect each other. Their self-image in their sex role will undoubtedly be enhanced.

Men in other ethnic groups see women's liberation as their liberation too. Bobby Seal, for instance, wrote in Seize the Time,

> In the Panther household everyone sweeps the floor, everyone makes the bed, and everyone makes a revolution because real manhood depends on the subjugation of no one.[53]

According to Gerassi, Che Guevara stated,

> ...the liberation of women should consist in the achievement of their total freedom---their inner freedom. It is not a matter of physical restriction which is placed on them to hold them back from certain activities. It is also the weight of previous tradition.[54]

William A. Blakey said in support of the women's movement,

> Black women and men should be walking beside each other. A woman need not be a slave or a competitor to "her man". Blacks should reject any definition of manhood which requires a woman to assume a domestic, submissive role and not involve herself in throwing off the yokes of sexism and racism.[55]

Henry Brown Blackwell, a white man said,

> I am the son of a woman and the brother of women. I know this is their cause, but I feel it is mine also. Their happiness, my happiness, their misery, my misery. The interest in the sexes are inseparably connected, and in the elevation of one lies the salvation of the other.[56]

Would you believe that Blackwell said this in 1853?

I was not able to find anywhere in the literature any quotations of similar statements made by Chicanos in support of the women's movement, though it is possible they exist. Through personal and professional contacts, however, I do know that some are ready to do so. They are aware that the definition of manhood that judges masculinity on a scale of power, dominance, toughness, violence, and aggression is no longer valid.[57] Neither is the definition of womanhood which judges femininity by superficiality, fragility, dullness, giddiness, coquettishness, lack of fortitude, lack of stability and lack of common sense.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the concerns of the women's movement with all the moral or ethical, intellectual, and psychological implications, embrace all women, but it has a particular relevance to minority women.[58] Chicanas share with all women the issues which concern them as women; welfare, employment, family planning etc., but this concern is in the context and with full awareness of

the needs of the Mexican American people.[59] Chicano issues and the issues of women converge.

Chicanas need to be self-determined. They need autonomy. Real autonomy means having freedom "to go along" with group or "to oppose it." Self-determination does not mean self-surrender. It also means freedom to identify the alternatives available and to select those which are most compatible with their personality, abilities, and life styles. They should be free to behave traditionally in some areas as their sense of morality dictates, the needs of their present reality determines; or to behave non-traditionally, as they choose. In a well integrated personality, behaviors manifest both orientations in various degrees, under certain circumstances or at various periods of life.[60] It is imperative that Mexican American women recognize, accept and respect the infinite diversity among them. Not all Chicanas will choose to be employed or to be married. Some will thoroughly enjoy being full-time housewives, a few will continue to be ambivalent. A considerable number will comfortably combine the roles of housewives and career women and may even do so with distinction.

By the same token they must recognize, accept and respect the infinite variety among Chicanos. Some as stated earlier, have always related or are now relating to women as equals and maintain a complementary relationship with them. Others are ambivalent. Their own sense of identity may be threatened. Attempts to change may cause conflicts that are difficult to resolve. Inperceptible changes are easily taken in stride, but sudden and/or major changes may require a general reorientation.[61]

It is very difficult, if not impossible, for some men or women to change. It is difficult to be free of outmoded sexual stereotypes that interfere with new adaptations, particularly towards each other in marriage. Older concepts of roles may no longer serve a useful purpose but they hang on, not only as myths, diffuse and pervasive but thoroughly inculcated in the unconcious.[62] Chicanas need to be patient with their men, but they must be "lovingly firm" in insisting that their rights be recognized. But in the process Mexican American women must not put their men in a double bind, self-rightiously urging them to change, and feeling contemptuous of them if they do. Emotions must not cloud reason. This is not easy. It requires a reser-

voir of understanding, patience, commitment and love; above all love.

La mujer Chicana ha sido siempre el eje de la familia. The Chicana has always been the mainstay of the family, and it is through her efforts that all Chicanos, male and female, old and young will ultimately reach equality and fulfillment. Her mental health as well as that of her family is dependent on her positive self-identity and self-image. She does not need to be in a double bind either. When she is herself and for herself, she is not betraying anyone--not her sex nor her group. In freeing herself to be herself, she is freeing others to be themselves too. The mental health of the family is dependent on the realignment of male-female relationships on the basis of equality--not female supplanting the male but accepting and maximizing the natural overlap of sexually defined characteristics. Equality will allow for maximum fulfillment of their potential as creative human beings. This can come from full awareness of herself--porque piensa en sí.

And what are the implications of these changes for mental health practice? How do the mental health professionals contribute to the optimum self-actualization of both men and women generally, and Mexican American men and women specifically? Do they still see intervention primarily as the alleviation of symptoms rather than as promoting self-actualization? Do their preconceptions about gender influence their practice? How sensitive are they to the effects of sex-role stereotyping and oppression on the mental health of the community? It is urgent that mental health practitioners develop self-awareness and identify their own social conditioning and biases; their preconceived notions of maleness and femaleness particularly as these apply to Mexican Americans. This may be particularly significant to the Mexican American pratitioners for their own need to either change or retain traditional views of men and women, may significantly affect services they provide. They should see beyond the individuals and strive to bring about social change. They must develop a political view of the client-therapist relationship,[63] and avoid the tendency to attempt "to change the victims of injustice rather than the forces perpetuating injustice."[64] This approach does not eliminate sexism any more than it has eliminated racism.

In their direct work, the mental health practitioners need to address the distinct

needs of Chicanos and the unique needs of Chicanas. Help them to work through their ambivalence about their new role definitions, to work through whatever guilt they experience. Even when their choice is to remain housewives, they need new awareness in realigning the marital relationship. And most importantly, help Chicanos to understand the meaning of the shift in roles and the significance for their self-concept and self-image. Help them to acquire a positive interpretation of the women's movement and to see that dignity for their manhood does not depend on the subjugation or the belittling of women. Persistence in nineteenth-century family patterns will not help families to meet the pressures on family life today. A stronger family structure can be built only if strong men and women are produced and who work together to their full potential closely, lovingly, and equally. Male liberation, like female liberation requires the same self-awareness and honesty. Human liberation is the goal.

Sylvia Alicia Gonzales says:

> The Chicana has a role in the /women's/ movement. The Chicana must have her place in the history of the Mexican American people. If there is no other way, then the Chicana must engage herself in her own battle for the liberation of her sisters. The Chicana is a creator and the bearer of La Raza. It is just and right that she give her children something more than the milk from her breasts. She must inspire and contribute. She must love and be loved. She must respect and be respected. But most important, she must be allowed her rightful position in shaping the destiny of her people--La Raza, her children, the Chicano.[65]

So adelante, Chicana. Know yourself. Define yourself. Be for yourself. And above all, piensa en ti. Your mental health and that of your family depends on it.

GG/op
June 13, 1975

NOTES

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